

Prolegomenon to the Individualistic Nature of Shinran's Thought

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In the *Tannishō* we read,

For me, Shinran, there is no reasoning; I believe only what my venerable teacher taught: 'Just call the Name and you will be delivered by Amida.'

and

When I reflect deeply on the Grand Vow issuing from five kalpas of Amida's meditation, I am convinced it was made utterly and solely for my sake.

Such confessions reveal the individualistic nature of his philosophy. They are not a mere conventional self-assertion, but reveal the ultimate affirmation of an individualistic stance brought home through absolute negation.

Buddhism seeks to grasp human existence not as a 'mortal man' (as in Christianity), nor as a 'being unto death' (as in philosophy), but as a 'living-dying' which ultimately realizes Nirvāṇa by transcending life and death. For Shinran, however, who was compelled to acknowledge the utter impossibility of overcoming the human and ego-centered limitations in his own existential predicament, his living-dying itself was acknowledged as sinful and his karma as evil. More basically his awareness of sinfulness was historically and concretely endorsed by the historical view of the Latter Day of Dharma in which the degenerate time and people are object of grief. That is to say, for Shinran, the Latter Day world was none other than his own karma and his own sinfulness was none other than the world's. In his thought the self and the world were clearly perceived as being rooted in the selfsame soil.

In such a self-awareness of sinfulness, Shinran was brought face to face with Tathâgata's Original Vow, transcending his own being and yet residing within it, that sustains his existence from its very basis. The Original Vow is the realm in which the deluded and unenlightened being are exposed by Tathâgata. It is the Compassionate Vow of Tathâgata to embrace all living beings so as to enable them all to attain Tathâgatahood. Therefore, Tathâgata who is the subject of the Original Vow and all living beings who are its object are destined to meet at the One Thought (instant) of Faith. It is the realization of the Original Vow which embodies the prayer: 'I shall never attain Buddhahood until all sentient beings are reborn in the Pure Land,' at the moment which Shinran called 'One Thought' or the shortest possible moment in which Faith reveals itself. In other words, attaining Buddhahood is realized at the Ever-present-moment in which, in Shinran's faith, 'Amida, at this moment attains Buddhahood.' And only at this time of the realization of the Original Vow or Amida's attaining Buddhahood is the mode of being in which Shinran could say 'for me Shinran alone,' or his real existential being, equally realized.

The pure subjectivity of Faith is the Oneness with Amida which is experienced at the original source of Amida's attaining Buddhahood, that is, the non-dual living subjectivity which is none other than 'Namu Amida Butsu.'